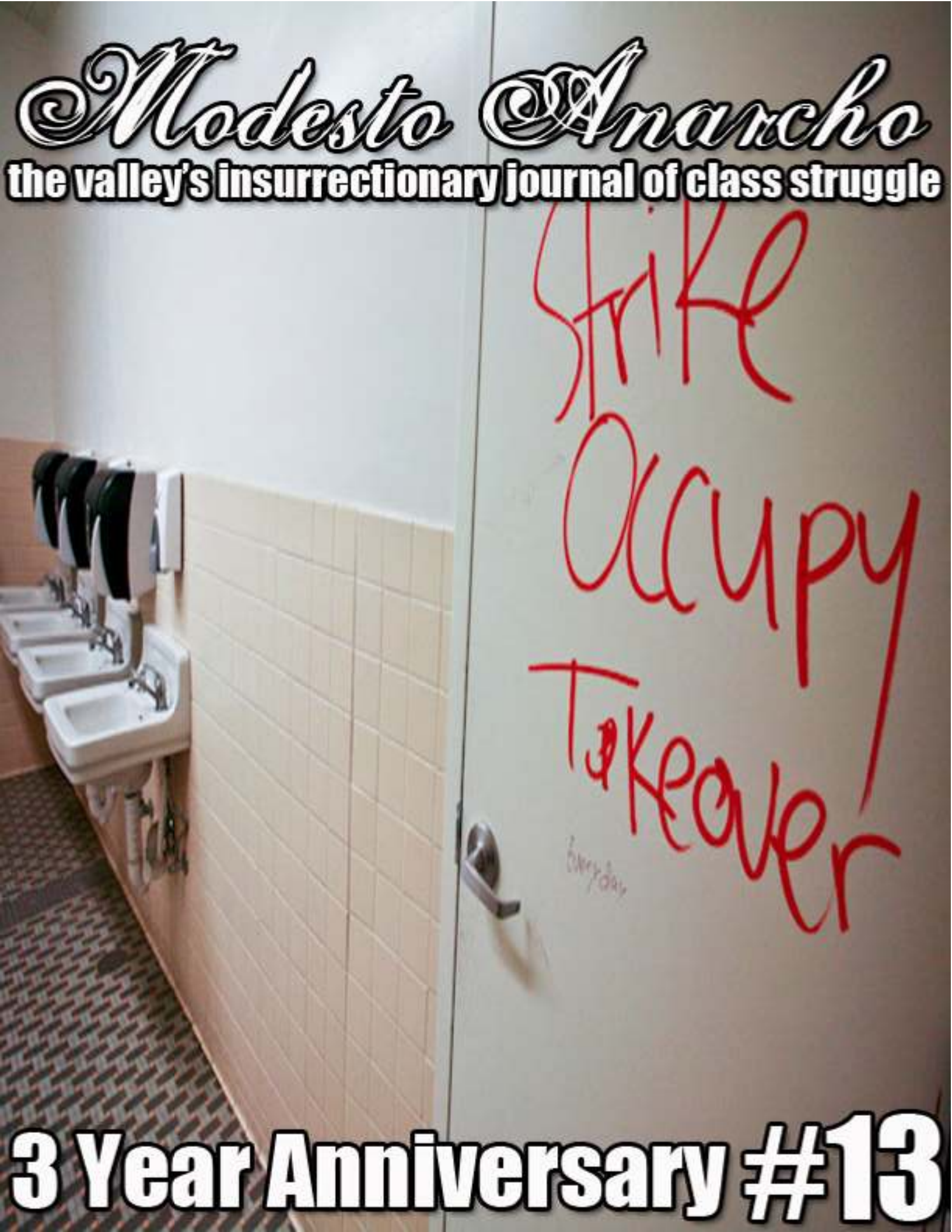
Modesto Anarcho

the valley's insurrectionary journal of class struggle



3 Year Anniversary #13

What We Believe

We want a stateless and classless society. We desire a world where all people have agency and control over their lives and power is spread out horizontally to all, not concentrated at the top. A world in which all resources that people need to exist are owned and cared for in common and in harmony with the Earth. We want to see human labor put towards human need - not profit.

We are against all governments and capitalism. We are against all governments because they are based upon controlling people through complete and total violence. Democracy only allows workers to elect their own dictators. Police, prisons, and borders make sure we do not attack and destroy the economy. We are against capitalism, because it is based upon class society; a world where a few own everything that we need in order to survive and the rest of us are forced to work for them. This is a system of wage slavery – in which we trade our lives for wages and then buy back what we need to survive with those wages. Capitalism cannot exist without government – it needs the government's violence to protect the privileged position of those who benefit from it.

Our class is broken up. By color, gender, sexuality - and much more. We are for the coming together of all people in this society who can only survive by the selling of their labor, time, and energy for money for the destruction of capitalism and its governments. Those who seek to divide our class are our enemies.

We reject the reformism of the Left - we are revolutionaries. We do not desire a seat at the table of politics; we desire working class power. We believe in people self-organizing for the purpose of taking direct action. Class society can only be attacked and destroyed and we must organize ourselves to carry out this attack and to maximize our own power. We believe that class society can only be done away with through the collective mass revolutionary action of all working, poor, and oppressed people that creates an international human community through social revolution.

Modesto Anarcho is a quarterly journal produced in Modesto California by Modesto Anarcho Crew (MAC). MAC is a street based organization that exists to create revolutionary propaganda, foster class consciousness, and participate and engage in class and community based struggles in our area. This publication is free to all.

We have no demands for this system; we seek only its destruction.

Everywhere. No matter if you are a worker in the fields. A student in the schools. Someone locked up. Facing deportation. Or a beating for who you choose to love. Forced to sell your time and energy to survive. Pay for a place to stay. Everywhere. We have a mandate for class war. If you want a reason you need only look at the amount of foreclosed homes on your street as the bankers that own them fill their gullets from a troff of bailout cash. Simply take a short break while picking fruit and vegetables and feel as the pesticides seep into your skin and you are paid slave wages. You can watch as your tuition costs jump through the roof as your hand graps the brand new lay off notice from work. Glance up from the want adds as your daughter cries and you remember that your food stamps have again run out. In the background of it all, *police sirens - the slamming of the prison doors*. As if to say, *"We'll always have a place for you here..."*

As capitalism's noose tightens around us, we struggle and attempt to gasp for air. We watch out for our friends and co-workers as we steal from work and from stores. We ignore the notices of 'foreclosure' and stay inside our homes for as long as possible - without paying rent. We come out of our cars and houses and into the streets to confront the police when someone is getting harassed and threatened with jail time. As we attempt to breathe; as we fight for more and more room, we also find others like us who are doing the same. Suddenly, the divisions between us based on race, sexuality, geography, and gender - *disappear*. We come to understand that those faced with a similar set of conditions, shared experiences, and moreover, *the same enemies*, can come to constitute a body of people with the power to turn this *whole thing inside out*. The film is called "The Disaster of Our Everyday Lives," and we've been selling popcorn in the lobby of this theater for as long as we can remember. We are glad that you have come outside with us just long enough to share a cigarette and to talk about burning the building to the ground...

But, in the midst of our discussion, we are interrupted by those that declare that we need petitions not graffiti. Politicians to vote for, not riots. Union bosses, not strikes and occupations. They have plans to march on Sacramento, to 'speak truth to power.' How sad. Power already knows the truth; it simply doesn't care. Those that seek to channel our discontent back into politics, the city council, 'the proper channels,' only wish to better manage and organize the world of rich and poor. The point however, has

always been to destroy it. We are for insurrection, not activism. We want revolution, not reform. We want power for ourselves, not a seat at the table of our enemies.

"But who is this Modesto Anarcho Crew?," some ask. "Thieves, terrorists, hooligans, and criminals!," others reply. What we are is almost uninteresting. For we are the same as so many of our class. People who work jobs that never pay enough. Those who try and get by, but never quite do, on unemployment and food stamps. People who are 'represented' in unions, yet always have no control or power in their workplace. Those who steal when they are hungry. Those who have gone to jail and hated it. Who despise the police. Who hate la migra. Who crossed out every swastika they saw in the bathroom and rolled their eyes during every meeting at work. We are not interesting. We are average. Ordinary. Everyday. What we do. Oh, what we do. Now that is the stuff that is interesting. This magazine is part of what we do. Our journal we unleash upon the world. For three years we have done this. For three years we have given this out for free and sent thousands of copies into prisons. We get fan mail. We receive threats from the police. We get respect on the street. We gain enemies. Such is life.

People are going on strike. Kids are taking over their schools. Neighborhoods are fighting the police. Our enemies gear up to confront us - and try and calm us down. For three years our project has been to document the struggles of working and poor people in our area. To talk shit on those among us who want peace with our enemies and give props to those who instead offer fire and rage. Three years of this; and we have only just begun. So dry your eyes over the state of the world. Someone has your back, more than you know. Someone else knows what's it like and is ready to get crazy.

"Who are we?" As the song goes: We are your friends. *You'll never be alone again.*

-crudo

Give Out Modesto Anarcho for Free!

Do you want to hand out copies of Modesto Anarcho in school, at work, where you live, or in prison? Would you like to give out copies of the magazine at an upcoming event or place them in a store, bar, or at the library? Simply email us and let us know! For those locked up in California, we can send you copies of the magazine and other class war publications for free. Write to us at:

Modesto Anarcho, PO Box 3027, Modesto, CA 95353
anarcho209@yahoo.com - modestoanarcho.org

PRISONER FEEDBACK

Greetings MAC,

I have just finished reading your zine and I am interested in learning more about what you do. Along with this letter, I send my upmost respects to you all.

My name is Mike, and I am from Modesto, (Airport District) and I am a former Nazi Low rider prison gang member. I am 38 years old and I am currently serving a 28 year prison term for a home invasion style robbery, on a sex offender/drug dealer.

I chose to walk away from my former associates, that decision wasn't made for me. I choose to bounce, because after many years of gang banging, I wasn't making any progress, at least not in the right direction. I didn't throw in the towel as a sign of capitulation, I did it to follow my own heart. If that makes any sense to you.

As to what my heart tells me, well...I know that stabbing my own people isn't very honorable, and that in order to fight the hand that keeps us down, I must shake this prison mentality.

Our only hope, is in the hands of our youth. No matter what you have to do, you have to reach the kids NOW.

The kids in juvenile halls is where to begin. Give up an hour, or two a week to volunteer. Kids need to know that they are not "throw a ways" they need love. The kid who is in juvenile hall and has no family will fall into any group who comes along and that is never good. There is no need to fill there head with high powered political stuff, just being there is enough. You can only lead those who respect you, not fear you or who are afraid to let you down. Give the kids your "true" love and the rest will come.

Thank you for your time and I would like to receive future zines of yours. Be good to each other.

With Love, Honor, Strength, and Respect
Your Homeboy,
Mike

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Legal Disclaimer: This magazine is for educational purposes only. It does not promote or condone any sort of illegal or violent behavior.

direct action news from the central valley

Early August: Employees of the United Way building in Modesto discovered two squatters occupying the roof. The resourceful pair had gotten past the thick metal plating at the base of the building and cut the locks on a fire escape ladder high above the ground, to which they added their own locks. Their living space was totally invisible from the street. They took advantage of the electrical outlets on the roof and plugged in surge protectors so they could use a DVD player and string lights. They had an inflatable mattress, a propane torch, candles, extension cord, and lots of clothing.

When United Way employees discovered the squatters, they confiscated (stole) some of the pair's personal belongings and changed the locks on the ladder. Apparently undeterred, the squatters were able to climb up to the roof again without cutting the locks. This time they rigged the air conditioning so that, instead of blowing into the inside of the building, it would blow on the roof where they were squatting. Unfortunately, United Way worked with the Modesto Police Department to get added patrols around the area to ensure that no one is squatting on the roof.

Charity organizations like United Way claim to improve the overall quality of life for individuals in our community, when the reality is that they will only help people on their own terms, rather than on the terms of people who genuinely need help. It is ironic that someone would squat the roof of a charity organization in the first place, and more so that a group that claims to help people would call the police on those who are resourceful enough to help themselves. As more people in our community face homelessness due to rising unemployment and foreclosures, it becomes more apparent that those in power will not help us in any way. Charity organizations will not help us either. We have to help ourselves by reclaiming unused space, so the rich can no longer profit from the control over what we all need to survive

Late September: In Modesto, a mob of people kicked a group of Christians out of the PRIDE festival. Sadly, but not surprisingly, the event organizers had already shut the festival down in order to avoid conflict between the protesters and event goers, who had begun to confront the hate mongers and throw objects at them. A video of the confrontation can be viewed on youtube.com. A post on the internet read:

"We are hanging out together. Talking. Reading. Eating. Watching a movie. The door slams open. "Hey, I just drove by the PRIDE festival and there's a bunch of anti-gay Christian protesters out there with signs." "Let's ride," one of us replies. We do. We're off. Into a couple separate cars we drive to the festival. We get there and look

around. The stage is being taken down. People are trickling out. Christian fascists stand around with signs screaming about sin and proclaiming that we are going to hell; reinforcing capitalist modes of sexual reproduction and patriarchal society. People stand around, just looking. Some of us yell at them. Security tells us to be quiet. One of them approaches and tells us in a hushed voice, "Just ignore them and they'll get the message." One of us looks at them and replies, "That's what Hitler said. The only way he said that his enemies could have stopped him is if they would have fought them in the streets. Which is what we aren't doing right now." The security guard looks down at the ground.

We are in the car again, driving. We arrive at our house. Our hands reach out for a blank banner, some spray paint, and video camera equipment. A text message is sent out to friends that reads, "Christians fascists at the park. Throw down. Tell friends." Quickly a message upon the banner is written that reads: "Reclaim Pride - Bash Back!" We arrive again at the park. We approach our enemies and start chanting for them to get out. A buzz is spreading throughout the crowd. People shake hands, meet old friends, and rush in from elsewhere. The police look worried; more people are coming to meet the zealots head on.

"Why did they shut down PRIDE? Where's the party at? Get out of the park! Who's Park? Our Park!" The chants change, but the message remains the same: leave now, or we'll confront you. The police inform us that we are on the verge of starting a riot and to not confront the protesters. Others tell us we're as bad as the fascists. We smile and laugh. We've heard this before. No. Actually, we're worse, because we are prepared to stand and fight. The crowd continues to grow. The protesters look at each other nervously as they attempt to preach to us despite the fact that we're yelling so loud no one can hear what they're saying at all. The police stand around the zealots and protect them and the social peace that hides the everyday social war. The protesters look at each other. They pack up. They leave. We've won.

People smile and slap each other on the back. We've had a victory. We later learn from talking to friends who had already been at PRIDE that when the protesters first showed up, the event organizers responded by shutting the event down. We also heard rumors that before we arrived, people threw bottles and confronted those attacking them...But thanks to the organizers of the event, so much for PRIDE. "This is where you're liberal leaders lead you," declares one rebel, as some of us make our rounds of the park after the fascists have left. Over 50 people participated in the confrontation. For these people, for a few moments they felt what it is like to come together as a group and push back not only against the police and our oppressors, but also experience something so much more than just listening to boring speakers and staring at the booths of non-profits and food vendors. They felt what it was like to win. To push back against what class society forces against us.

This is what it means to intervene. To stand up for ourselves. At work. In the streets. In our neighborhoods. Everywhere. To all the haters who are tripping off of everyday people bringing da ruckus – you're the ones that are just as bad. We see you, hi hater. We have begun, where you at? This is Modesto muthafucka. 209. Holla.

-Some of those accused of inciting a riot."

Late September: In Merced and Davis, UC students and workers went on strike against cuts to school classes, wages and hours, and also the raising of student fees. Workers (not on strike) at UC Davis, according to www.indybay.org, honored the strike and went home for the day, helping to shut down the campus. Our hats go off to these workers who respected those in struggle and made it harder for the bosses to continue business as usual. While the workers were picketing, students conducted a mass rally against the cuts and fee hikes, and according to some sources, also attempted to occupy an administration building for a short period of time. In Merced, there was a small rally and protest against the fee hikes.

Early October: In Fresno, on September 23, two Fresno police officers shot and killed Lonnie Graham. He was unarmed (for more information, see the repression section). Police chief Jerry Dyer said his officers feared for their lives when Graham emerged from a house with a cell phone in his hand. On October 9th, a march and protest was held in downtown Fresno outside of the police station against the murder of the young man. About 75 people chanted and held signs for several hours.

Late October: In Fresno, hundreds of students from the California State University, marched to protest recent fee increases, class cuts, and furloughs handed down from the

Stonewall, Riots, and Pride

Largely taken from, "Militant Flamboyance: A Brief History of the Stonewall Riots"

In the late 1960s and the years prior, gay bars served as one of the very few places that gay, lesbian or transgendered people could gather with one another. However, even these spaces were often unable to provide the opportunity to comfortably and safely gather. Often times, they were owned by straight men and/or connected to the mob and were looking to make money at the expense of the gay community rather than serve it. Gay bars were also regularly subjected to police raids as most states had anti-gay laws, including statues regarding "gender-appropriate" clothing and laws making it a crime to serve alcohol to a homosexual. Along with these laws that were on the books, police forces would find additional excuses to take out their anti-gay hostility. These policies reflected a larger culture of homophobia and anti-gay sentiment.

Stonewall Inn was a sleazy and gritty gay bar that was established and run by Mobsters who would pay off the cops to keep raids to a minimum, let the management of Stonewall know when they were coming, and raid early in the night when business was slow. During the early morning on June 28th, 1969, the cops again raided Stonewall, this time with no prior warning. Usually, the only ones arrested were those without IDs or those dressed in clothes of the "opposite gender" (New York law required three articles of clothing "appropriate to one's gender.") Not unlike other clashes with the police, a crowd began to form around Stonewall, and at the beginning of the raid, the police began arresting people for the usual reasons.

Some of the arrestees began striking poses as they were being led off by the police while others arrested or confronted were mouthing off, and some threw their coins at the cops. Still the authorities continued to shove some arrestees into the police wagon. Some consider the most explosive moment to be when a butch lesbian was arrested and thrown in the wagon and began to rock it. Around this point in the night, some accounts speak of several spontaneous flashes of anger, a mass opposition, and militant refusal to accept the police harassment. One queen took off her high heel, smashed a police officer and knocked him down, grabbed his handcuff keys and freed herself. She then passed along the keys to her comrades, while others started to yell "Pigs!" "Faggot Cops!" and "Gay Power!" All of this led to the crowd transforming and growing into a mob, which began throwing everything possible at the police; bricks, bottles, garbage cans, even dog shit.

The police, who seriously underestimated a bunch of "queers" and "gays," only sent eight police officers to perform the raid, and when the unexpected near riot broke out, the police were ordered by their commander to retreat into the bar. They barricaded themselves in, which of course led to attacks on the bar from the resistance in the street, including people using a parking meter as a battering ram. Eventually the crowd partially breached the barrier between them and the police, and one rioter successfully tossed a match and some lighter fluid into the bar, starting a fire. The cops, with pistols pulled, were ready for another clash, and one yelled, "We'll shoot the first motherfucker that comes through the door!" Eventually the cops cleared the streets. The night resulted in several rioters beaten, four cops injured, and thirteen arrested. The next two nights, riots again broke out, as other people came out to fight the police.

In the aftermath of the Stonewall riots, various groups, projects, and organizations were formed, ushering in the Gay Liberation Movement. As a way of remembering the courageous actions of those in New York who rioted and fought the police, yearly Gay Pride marches and festivals were held in many cities, including Modesto. But, as the years passed, and PRIDE became more and more mainstream, and being gay in this society became just another market to pander to, PRIDE was co-opted away from its original purpose of celebrating queer resistance to the police and oppression.

It is important to keep in mind that this is what the political Left does. PRIDE used to be about celebrating rioting and fighting the police. Now it is about corporations sponsoring marches and setting up booths that cater to a gay market. Capitalism has again succeeded in turning something that seeks to attack it back into another way to make money. And what was once a way to show power and force against a society that seeks to restrict sexual freedom, instead has degenerated into properly controlled marches and events where the police are there to make sure things don't get out of hand – or at the very least, stay within the realms of people simply getting drunk and partying. The political Left, made up of the organizers of these events, are also happy to oblige in the managing of all of this, while at the same time presenting the illusion that such events seek to change society. When PRIDE organizers in Modesto shut the entire event down to prevent people from confronting Christian protesters attacking them, they showed themselves to not only be a complete dishonour to the spirit of Stonewall, but also totally unable to do anything to actually confront and stop homophobia in this society. We also see the actions of the police in trying to keep the two groups from clashing to show again that they exist to keep the divisions of class, race, and gender firmly in place. Nothing has changed since Stonewall except that its legacy has been perverted by those that today would denounce the actions of the militant New York queers who fought the police in 1969. Bash back and fuck those that would steal our history.

CSU system. The near six-hour protest was the culmination of weeks of campaigning by many organizations encouraging students to walk out of their classrooms. Students began exiting classrooms around 10 a.m. Protesters then marched for about an hour throughout campus and made their way to Shaw and Cedar avenues, holding picket signs and chanting, about 600 strong. The group then rallied with students and faculty addressing a crowd of several hundred.

Then, students headed towards the administration building, where they proceeded to hold a sit-in. According to indybay.org: "After the march there was a post-rally followed by a group of the students taking the list of demands to Welty's (CSU Fresno President) office on the 4th floor of the library (in the rally there were many references to Welty's tower where he could look down on his subjects and maintain inaccessibility). The students were initially met by campus police who blocked the elevator saying they had to make sure it was okay for us to come up, so we took the stairs. Once the small group made it up there we were met in the hallway by campus police who said President Welty was not there, we asked where he was. As this dialogue was going on, students just kept coming out of the elevators, eventually they had to let us further in so everyone could fit, by the end we had moved forward nearly 30 feet and had 80 students clogging up the hallway leading to the administrators' offices."

For the first time in Fresno State's history all admissions, including transfers, have been canceled for the spring semester. In Fall 2010, the university announced that it will reduce enrollment by approximately 400 eligible students. The CSU system-wide is calling for a reduction of enrollment by 40,000 students over the next two years. High school students who have been told that if they do well in school they can earn a college degree are facing a broken promise because meeting the minimum eligibility requirements will no longer guarantee a student a place in the CSU. Just this past year, students saw a 32% increase in their fees. This comes on top of multiple fee increases over the last several years. Since 2002, tuition has increased 182%. Just recently the Chancellor's office and the Board of Trustees announced the possibility of an additional 10% increase next year.

Late October: In Modesto, campaign signs were taken and remade with anti-political and anti-rich messages. A post on indybay.org stated: "Campaign signs were redecorated throughout Modesto and placed up in various high traffic areas in District 4. Those running in this district include someone who works at a prison and is backed by the police, a real estate mogul, and Robert Stanford, who is responsible for getting the Modesto Needle Exchange shut down. The cop, the capitalist, and the snitch. With candidates like these, who needs enemies? Elections will never serve the working class, they only put more barriers before us. We need community control and power from the ground up, not saviors from the top down. We are not interested in politics - only its destruction."

Late October: A "Roving Dance Party Against the Fee Hikes" hit Modesto Junior College. A post online about the event read:

"Modesto Junior College, perhaps the cheapest institution of higher learning in the state of California, has recently had 180 classes cut from its roster. Fees have also risen from $20 per unit to $26, meaning that students are paying more and getting less: the constant refrain of the ongoing economic crisis. Meanwhile at California State University (CSU) Stanislaus, (the school that most MJC graduates go on to attend), the entire winter semester has been abolished and fees are being raised by 32%. While UC students at campuses like UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz have launched successful occupations at their schools and engaged in a variety of confrontational tactics – students in the Central Valley, (with the exception of students at CSU Fresno who walked out of their school in late October by the hundreds), have been slow to respond.

On Monday of this week, students at MJC walked onto campus to find that the entire perimeter of the school had been covered in flyers that read, "Dance Party Against the Fee Hikes!," and encouraged students to bring music, friends, and party favors. The flyer

The Capitalist, the Cop, and the Snitch

"The representation of the working class has become an enemy of the working class." – Guy Debord

This election cycle, voters in Modesto were able to vote in district elections: meaning that they could vote for city council members based upon where they lived throughout the city. District 4 became probably the 'biggest battle' in the city; and one of the most heated. Fighting over the seat was Joe Muratore, Robert Stanford, and Jeff Perine. At first glance, the candidates themselves seem very different. Joe Muratore is a real estate mogul, who promotes more growth (ie urban sprawl) and business interests. Muratore is also a member of the La Loma Association, the group that represents a neighborhood of largly upper-middle class professionals who have pushed for more surveillance cameras in local parks and the criminalization of dumpster diving. Jeff Perine works at a Youth Prison in Stockon, and comes from a cop family. Surprise, surprise, he has the backing of the police department and promotes a 'tough on crime' platform. Stanford comes from the working class Airport District, and also takes a tough on gangs approach along with a lot of rhetoric of 'representing' working families.

Using democracy's logic, many would conclude that Robert Stanford was the clear option for those looking for someone that was fight for working class interests within the power structure. Indeed, this is how Stanford has portrayed himself, as someone that would fight the "old guard," of the city, while being a voice for working people. Of course, the reality is much different. As a "community activist," Stanford has done some commendable things, for instance fighting for rent control and a curb to police brutality in the local area. However, Stanford has shown his true colors in the last year, as he was the top informant in the undercover investigation against the Modesto Needle Exchange group. He also has been known to call the police on youth in the downtown area that he finds suspicious, and told the Modesto Copwatch members who videotaped one such incident to "suck my dick."

Of course Stanford, having hardly any money to actually run a political campaign, lost the race to Muratore, arguably the candidate with the largest amount of political connections and access to money. Could we come to expect anything less in such an election, with candidates from the poor Airport District going up against the up scale La Loma Neighborhood? Even if Stanford was someone who seriously cared about working class issues, they would be alone in a power structure that feeds on business and political connections. The crisis brought on by foreclosure, budget cuts, and job loss are also symptoms of the larger system of capitalism – more politicians just mean different bosses for that system, not an end to the problems that they create. Politicians like Stanford (and Obama) will forever hold out the illusion that by electing them we will change the conditions which impoverish our lives, but in reality, all we are doing is giving the newest set of idiots the keys to the city. Sure, a new group of politicians might rock the boat in small ways, but they ultimately can't and won't change the very nature of this system, that keeps the rich rich, and the poor stuck as wage slaves. They won't get rid of prisons, homelessness, the destruction of the natural world – only we can do this. Many people already believe this. In District 4, only several hundred people actually voted. In South Side Modesto, one of the most impoverished areas, voter turn out didn't reach above 500 people. If we understand voting to be bullshit – let's start recognizing the ways in which we can act that will give ourselves--not some politician--power. We can organize on the job and go on strike; taking over our workplaces. We can loot and take goods for free while at work or where we live. We can take over vacant lots to grow food and housing to live in. We can destroy the economy which places us into poverty instead of electing the managers which will only help it to continue.

ended by stating, "Strike//Occupy//Takeover." This same slogan was then repeated in a larger poster, 11" by 17". 1,000 quarter sheet flyers were then distributed the next day across campus and on the day of the dance party a banner was dropped from the art building that read, "Stop the Fee Hikes! Dance Party in Quad 2Nite, 8pm." Graffiti in the bathrooms at MJC has also been appearing throughout the campus for weeks, calling for unity between staff, students, and faculty against the cuts and hikes. All this was organized in just a few days by a group of friends, many of which are former or current students at Modesto Junior College.

On Tuesday, we arrived on campus with about 10 people, and headed to go check out the "Vigil for Education," which was happening right before the dance party was supposed to start. We were hoping that the other group would bring a good sized group of people out, and hopefully when it was finished, many would stick around for the dance party. We had seen no flyers around campus for the event and the wind was blowing heavily, making the idea of holding candles on a dark night in the middle of an empty quad that much more totally unappealing. When we arrived, we found about 10 other people standing around in a circle, giggling. They held no signs or flyers, there were no banners, and besides that fact that they were holding candles, there was nothing to let you know they were doing anything else than just hanging out. Several within the group announced their dislike for the dance party idea, and stated that they didn't want to "chant and yell at people," that by holding a vigil they would get "people to listen to them." Other members within the group hid in bushes around those waiting for the dance party to start and tried to video tape us. Wendy Byrd, Director at MJC and a leader within the local chapter of the NAACP chapter, was also on the scene trying to ask questions of those there (in an effort to find out who the organizers for the dance party were), and also spent a lot of time talking to the security guards who were situated nearby watching the whole scene. People also complained to us that "masked men had run into class rooms, throwing dance party flyers everywhere," (we can't make this shit up folks!), had been putting banners up around the school, and had "super glued" flyers to various walls.

At 8pm, the student activists left. A boom box appeared and people began to dance. At this point about 20-25 people were in attendance. The group quickly made its way towards the Founders' Hall, which is the largest classroom building on campus. Chanting, "Stop the Fee Hikes, Dance Dance All Night," people moved in and out of buildings for about 30-40 minutes, inviting students still in class to come out and join them. A banner that the crowd carried read, "Strike//Occupy//Takeover." Many came out and looked – but few actually joined us. Security followed closely behind videotaping the entire event, and then stated that they had called the police. At this point, the group handed out copies of a text that has been circulating on the internet, "Occupy the Crisis: The Emerging Student-Worker Direct Action Movement in California ," diapered and went in small groups off school grounds.

The student activists at MJC who organized the vigil disgust us – although we are sadly not surprised. They made no attempts at making gestures of solidarity with us, not even an acknowledgment of a set of different tactics but still shared enemies. For them, this is another student project to take pictures of and make videos for. For us, this is something that affects our lives. Their ideas for action are so weak and stupid they barely need to be critiqued. Holding candles in the dark that no one will see does nothing. It does nothing to raise consciousness or build power and it certainly does nothing to challenge those in power. Those that run this state would like nothing more if all we did was hold candles in the dark. It is only in conflict and action that we will find out how much power we do have to improve our material conditions. One thing is clear – the school administration and the activists were scarred of us, and wanted nothing to do with us. As well they should be; we clearly were better organized than they were anyway.

We understand the university system to be a part in the reproduction of class society. Like everything else within Capital, we do not wish to 'reform' the university, or make it more 'democratic.' Like our comrades wrote, "We wish to push the university struggle to its limits." We were excited by the possibility of an event spinning out of control of anyone's hands; a constructed situation that put desire, confrontation, and human connection above the rule of the police and the university leaders. Tonight was a step in the right direction, although a very small one. We are still those that will never play by the rules of politics or activism– we make our own. Everyday we grow stronger and better organized. Share your hushed rumors about us between yourselves, for we plan to be so, so, so much worse.

-some of the bad seeds

Early November: In Modesto, nazi graffiti along Dry Creek, (which included swastikas and "ss" symbols), was covered up by anarchist graffiti which read "kill nazis" and "destroy racism."

Mid November: In Fresno, groups again protested and marched outside of the Fresno Police Station, calling for the firing of Police Chief Dryer. During the demonstration, an off-duty officer pushed a child as he went from the street to the sidewalk. He was confronted by family members and acted very aggressively. Despite his denial of being an officer he was seen after the protest working out in the police department gym. As the Fresno Brown Berets wrote on indybay.org, "There have been 9 murders by police this year, 4 since Dyer took office. Every single one has been deemed justified by Dyer. He and his force consistently resist any calls for transparency or accountability. If Dyer was really interested in public safety (for all of Fresno, not just the wealthy and/or white) he would have nothing to hide. More training for the police or an Independent Police Auditor isn't enough; Dyer's corrupt reign will never change. We as a community must not be fooled by Dyer's rhetoric…"

Mid November: In Modesto, members and supporters of the Needle Exchange program, went into Mono Park, aka 'Heroin Park," in the Airport District, where the project used to operate and collect dirty needles that were littered throughout the area. Since the project has been shut down by the local Sheriff's Department, needle users have few ways to safely dispose of dirty needles, and parks have once again been filling up with dirty, possibly disease infected syringes. Members of the "Off the Streets Project," also went door to door, passing out information and letting those in the community know where they could go to properly dispose of syringes in an effort to clean up the local parks. Check out their blog at offthestreetsproject.blogspot.com.

Mid November: In Modesto, people took over a park off of Martin Luther King Blvd in the West Side. People there put up banners including one reading, "Community BBQ: Reclaim the City!" Bringing out a generator, people bumped hip hop and Michael Jackson while grilling up hot dogs and chicken wings. Free reading material was made available and people also did a clean up of the alleys around the parks, picking up thrown away needles.

Mid November: In Turlock, students held two small sit-ins at the administration building at CSU Stanislaus, against fee hikes and faculty firings.

Late November: In Davis and Fresno, students at UC Davis and CSU Fresno engaged in occupations and sit-ins at their schools against fee hikes, budget cuts, and the firing of faculty. In Davis, the action began when hundreds of students gathered in and around Mrak Hall (the main administration building) to protest a 32% hike in tuition over the next year at all UC schools. This tuition hike brings student costs to over $10,000 a year. The building was eventually occupied by students, 52 of which were arrested.

In Fresno, according to *The Collegian Online*, "Students took over the Henry Madden Library at California State University, Fresno on Friday night to push the administration to extend library hours. Ninety-four students, along with several staff and faculty members, remained inside of the library after it closed at 5 p.m. Students who were present said they planned to stay inside the library for 24 hours." Many supporting students, community members, and faculty were also outside in order to try and stop the police from making arrests and also to support those inside. At one point in the night, after university officials locked the doors, students inside opened the doors and allowed those outside to enter the building and allow supplies to be given out to the occupiers. Students at other schools released statements of solidarity with those in Fresno, such as one that read, "We on the campuses that are fighting back applaud CSU Fresno in their contributions to the fight. And we call on all campuses to join."

Davis students returned to reoccupy Mrak Hall several days later. According to reports online: "There can be no "discussion" with administrators once they have already called in repressive forces to coerce and intimidate their interlocutors. What happened at UCLA, UCD, UCB, and UCSC between Nov. 18 – Nov. 22 will not soon be forgotten: police deployments by the administration effectively militarized our campuses; students and faculty were arrested en masse; a UCSC professor fell from a second story patio and was carried from the scene on a stretcher; students at UCLA were tasered; a student at UC Davis was repeatedly slammed against the hood of a car; students at UC Berkeley were beaten and maimed by punitive riot cops. The nightstick, the taser, the riot shield became an extension of the bureaucratic violence of the administration. All this because students occupied buildings in order to refuse the privatization of their universities, as do students in Europe for weeks, without any police response whatsoever. The sequence of events that unfolded last week—and the UC administration's accountability for the brutality that ensued—is a fact that has consequences. We will certainly continue to resist and to struggle collectively; but we should not enter in dialogue with administrators who have proven themselves to have no respect whatso-

ever for our collective well-being, until they prove otherwise by refusing to deploy police forces that have demonstrated their malice and incompetence. There are no "students" "faculty" "staff" any longer, among those who manifest themselves at Mrak."

In Davis and Merced, workers also held pickets and handed out information in relation to cuts and layoffs at their respective UC schools.

Early December: Authorities are now searching for an inmate who escaped from a Central Valley prison. State Corrections Department pigs are now on the lookout for a 37-year-old man who went missing from the Taft Community Correctional Facility. Locked up on a non-violence drug charge, his earliest possible parole date was November 2011. Go, go, go!

Early December: In Stockton, a man pulled over for a traffic violation and driving with a suspended liscene, attempted to ram his car into the arresting officer. The man then took off and was eventually beaten and arrested by police. At least he got a few licks in himself.

Early December: In Turlock, students at CSU Stanislaus, workers, and people from the community protested outside of CSU President Shirvani's mansion in an upscale neighborhood. Here is a report back from someone at the demonstration:

"On Saturday, December 5th, students, faculty, and workers took to the streets of an upscale neighborhood in Turlock California, located about 15 minutes south of Modesto, to protest outside of the home of CSU President, Dr. Shirvani. Shirvani makes around $350,000 a year, and receives more in car and housing allowances than many professors make in a year. Faculty at the university have recently voted almost 90% in "No Confidence" of the President, and student outrage against him is at an all time high.

Faculty at CSU Stanislaus have faced job lay offs of up to 20% and many staff workers have also been laid off or have had their hours cut. For students, fees have risen by ten percent over the last couple of years every year, while class room sizes have risen and many classes have been eliminated. Shirvani has also outright abolished winter term, which for many students means a loss of access to certain classes that they need. This move was also opposed by about 80% of the students, according to certain polls taken.

This action was the most confrontational and militant yet by CSU Stanislaus students, as previous actions have included small sit-ins in early-mid November of the administration building, which resulted in closed door meetings between several students and the President. Nothing came out of these meetings but Shirvani re articulating that he will continue to make cuts and break down the public university system towards a more privatized one. Flipping the popular student slogan around, Shirvani has stated, "Education is a privilege, not a right."

As the recent article on the CFA (California Faculty Association) website stated (http://restructuringcsu.wordpress.com/), Shirvani is leading the forefront assault on education, that seeks to make it harder for working class students to go to college and will push out various majors such as art and philosophy, promoting instead more online courses and bigger class room sizes.

About 30 students protested outside of Shirvani's home for about an hour, and despite at the end three police cars showing up to guard the house (one of them being a CSU Police car - showing again that the university police are NOT NEUTRAL in this struggle), students remained loud and resolved. More actions like this and constant pressure are needed to stop the job lay offs of faculty and staff, the rising student fees, and the cuts to classes and services for students. As many students stated during Saturday, the time for working within the system and writing letters is over. More than ever we need unity between staff, faculty, and students, as we fight against our class enemies within the university.

We have no faith in the student government. They are an arm of the administration. We have no faith in the student leaders among the "movement" which seek to police and direct us - we are not children, we can organize ourselves. "Socialist" student cops are still cops. We

have no faith in asking politely for our enemies to change. We will take, we will strike. We will occupy. We will takeover."

Mid December: In Turlock, students and workers at CSU Stanislaus walked out of classes (many of which were canceled by the faculty) and held a rally of about 300 people (according to local media) in the Quad. Faculty and students were vocally against the student government (which was booed when they attempted to address the crowd), and students also held a march and a short sit in at the Presidents office. Two texts about the actions are reprinted:

Hundreds Rally at CSUS, Storm President's Office
by a student

Today we found power. We found it in ourselves, and we found it in each other. We found it in our collective self on the quad of CSU Stanislaus. We found it again in MSR, when the administration hid behind the boys in blue rather than face us. And we found it once more when we got in.

Today, around 200 students, faculty, and staff walked out of their classes around 11:00 AM and met in the quad at CSU Stanislaus. After an hour-long rally, filled with speeches of discontent and enraging stories of the downward spiral of our university. 150 of us marched across campus to the Mary Stuart Rogers building (the administration building). Met with police barricades, we continued on towards the intersection of Geer Road and Monte Vista/University Way (arguably the busiest intersection in Turlock). After rallying there for fifteen minutes, we returned to the MSR building with 60 people to sit down in President Shirvani's office on the third floor around 1:00 PM. After another half an hour of discussion and wall-shaking chants, we left of our own accord.

Today was a victory. However, we are not without regrets. Today's numbers are unprecedented. This is likely the largest show of power the people of Turlock have ever manifested. At a university where normality consists not of radicals and hippies, but of nursing students and teachers, with no history of agitation or radical politics, we interrupted it, if only briefly.

That said: today we did not fulfill our desires. Today's action was rife with infighting and attempts at liberal remediation. Several individuals in particular showed up to the initial rally with the intention of co-opting the mass of students to their own goals of "speaking truth to power" and establishing a dialog with the administration, in stark contrast to the wishes of those assembled. We fell short of our potential when we refrained from storming Shirvani's office the first go-around, in fear of two police officers. We fell short when, at Geer and Monte Vista, we refrained from taking the streets, again for fear of police intervention. And we fell short when we allowed our energy to drain out in a matter of minutes after reaching Shirvani's office. Diminished already, with no support or resources to commence an occupation, and no direction or energy to escalate, those of us who remained in MSR filed out in the specter of what could have happened today.

But in that specter lies the possibility for so much more. We learned several lessons today. We have the power to organize in significant numbers, even on a CSU in the middle of the Central Valley. We are not alone in our discontent; everyone on our campus, at other CSUs, at the Community Colleges, and the UCs, everyone is feeling the effects of this crisis, and everyone is angry. We have broad faculty support. Even at CSU, we find ourselves faced with the leftist squanderers and student cops that our comrades at the UCs faced. It is a disservice to ourselves, and our desires, to allow such elements to remain within our ranks unannounced. Most importantly, we learned that we have the power to create the conditions in which we could act out our desires for our campus. Until next time.

Solidarity to SF State! Solidarity to Wheeler Hall! Solidarity to all of our comrades who are resisting at their campuses and workplaces across California and the world! We want to take a minute and especially shout out to our comrades who came from MJC today; towards the liberation of not only universities, but community colleges!

love,
a student from the valley

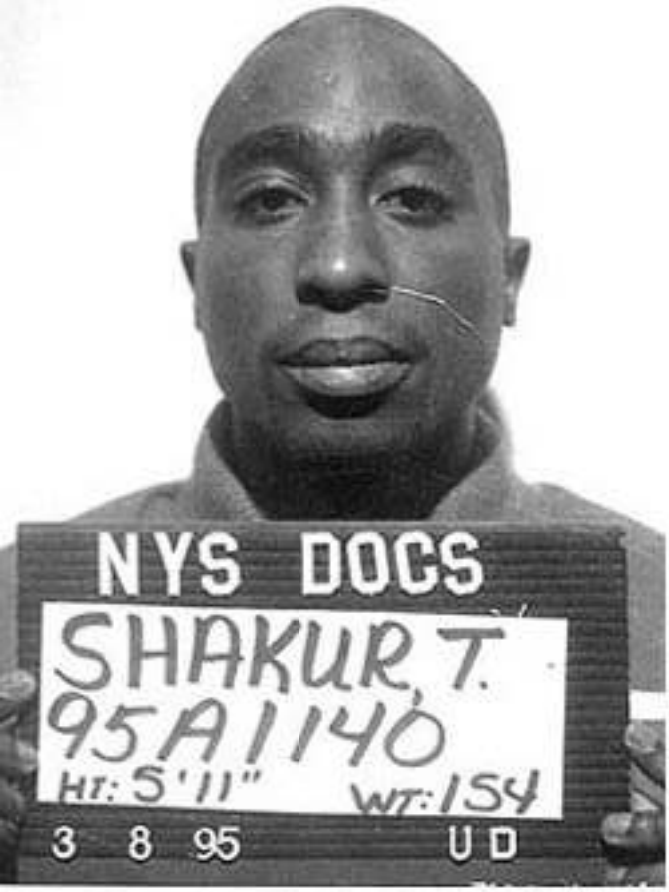
A note to fellow students and workers of CSU Stanislaus
by Students and Workers of the Central Valley

On December 9th, the students, staff and faculty of CSU Stanislaus gathered in the quad to voice their grievances against an administration that uses education as an opportunity to profit at the expense of the students. Throughout the course of the rally, attendees discussed the President's incompetence and affects the current wave of fee hikes and class cuts have had on our lives. It cannot be stressed enough that Shirvani and his administrative staff are not acting in the interests of students, teachers, and workers. Where we see an opportunity to make something out of ourselves, he sees an opportunity to increase the size of his wallet. And this is an approach that is being implemented more and more by those who control things. When the level of privatization in our society increases, the quality and depth of our lives decrease. When we take the time to look at the structures that operate around us, it is apparent that those that are set up to create profit for people like Shirvani are expected to be paid for by us, students and workers. They want us to pay for their crisis.

We should recognize something here: that unity creates power. Becoming aware of our role in this struggle is vital to keep up the momentum that gets things done. Coming together to act on our anger gives us a vehicle to realize our collective desires. What we accomplished today as an organized force was something that is not experienced by regular people in today's world: the creation of our own power. It is important to understand that by acting, and by acting with each other, even if we were present for different reasons, we can take back control of our lives.

With love and solidarity,
-Some students and workers from the Central Valley

Early Janurary: In Modesto, a banner was dropped over highway 99 in support of those arrested for organizing a needle exchange program. A post online read: "Kristy & Brian are scheduled to be in a Modesto court this coming Feb. 1rst @ 1:30 pm. A Rally is scheduled for noon. A judge will determine that day whether a "Medical Defense Necessity" will be used for their defense. March 1rst they start Trial! Off the Streets Project was spawned out of this repression. It's a syringe & safe disposal clean-up crew of individuals. Recently 60 syringes were cleaned up in the Airport District around Mono Park where Modesto Needle Exchange ran it's unauthorized & self-organized exchange back in April 2009, before it was shut down. The following Monday at court, a 3 year stay away order was issued to both defendants, 3 years probation, & one defendant, 30 days in county jail. Sound fishy? Hmmmm... In the meantime, up to this point, the Harm Reduction Coalition (Oakland CA,) has been on board, literally letters from all over the world came in supporting dropping the charges against the two, court after court appearance were made, & an alliance of loyal supporters have joined Kristy & Brian in support. Stand with them Feb. 1."



"Cause it's time to make the payback fat
To my brothers on the block better stay strapped
And accept no substitutes
I bring truth to the youth tear the roof off the whole school
Oh no, I won't turn the other cheek
In case ya can't see us while we burn the other week
Now we got him in a smash, blast
How long will it last 'til the po' gettin mo' cash
Until then, raise up!"

-2pac, Holla If Ya Hear Me

REPRESSION IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY

Fresno Police Make the Streets Run Red With Blood: Fresno Police officers shot and killed John Cooper in north-west Fresno. According to Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer, Cooper called 911 and said he would "shoot the first cop I see." Dyer said the man called the police a second time and said he wanted to kill himself. Officers arrived at Marks and Santa Ana Avenues at a little after 10 a.m. They saw Cooper, who had what appeared to be a gun pointed to his head, according to Dyer. Dyer said Cooper pointed what turned out to be a toy gun at the officers and they opened fire.

Also killed by the Fresno police recently was 32 year old Steven Vargas of Fresno. Vargas was involved in a car accident on McKinley avenue in central Fresno. An officer arrived on the scene and ordered Vargas out of his car. When he refused, the officer, whose name the FPD will not release, opened fire killing Vargas. No weapon was found in either incident.

On September 23, yet another person was killed by the FPD, Lonnie Graham, who was shot to death by Fresno police officers when he stepped out of a house with a cell phone in his hand. The officers involved said they feared for their lives. Graham was found to be unarmed. At a press conference after that shooting, Dyer said Graham was a gang member, that someone might have seen him armed recently, and that he had an extensive criminal record. The police are an out of control gang that can murder and kill at will. Attempts to dialog with the police are pointless; their power must be met head on and confronted.

More Surveillance Cameras in Merced: While people in the valley are laid off from their jobs and more and more people are evicted, t he city of Merced is in the final stages of installing a $93,000, eight-camera video surveillance system in the downtown. The system will be part of a wider net of cameras monitored by the Merced Police Department, which will include video surveillance at three Merced high schools as well as businesses that want to be part of the system, say city officials and the Police Department. "Think of the cameras as an extra police officer who's available to watch over particular locations," city spokesman Mike Conway said. Merced is not the only valley city monitoring its downtown, Modesto, Manteca, Ripon, Livingston, and Fresno all also have extensive surveillance camera systems. The Merced City Council voted unanimously for the cameras in June. Studies in Europe and the US show that cameras do next to nothing to curb crime, and help the police and city governments rake in the money from fines and tickets. Out into the streets - with slingshots, bb guns, rocks, and slingshots! Stab out the eyes of the rich and their police!

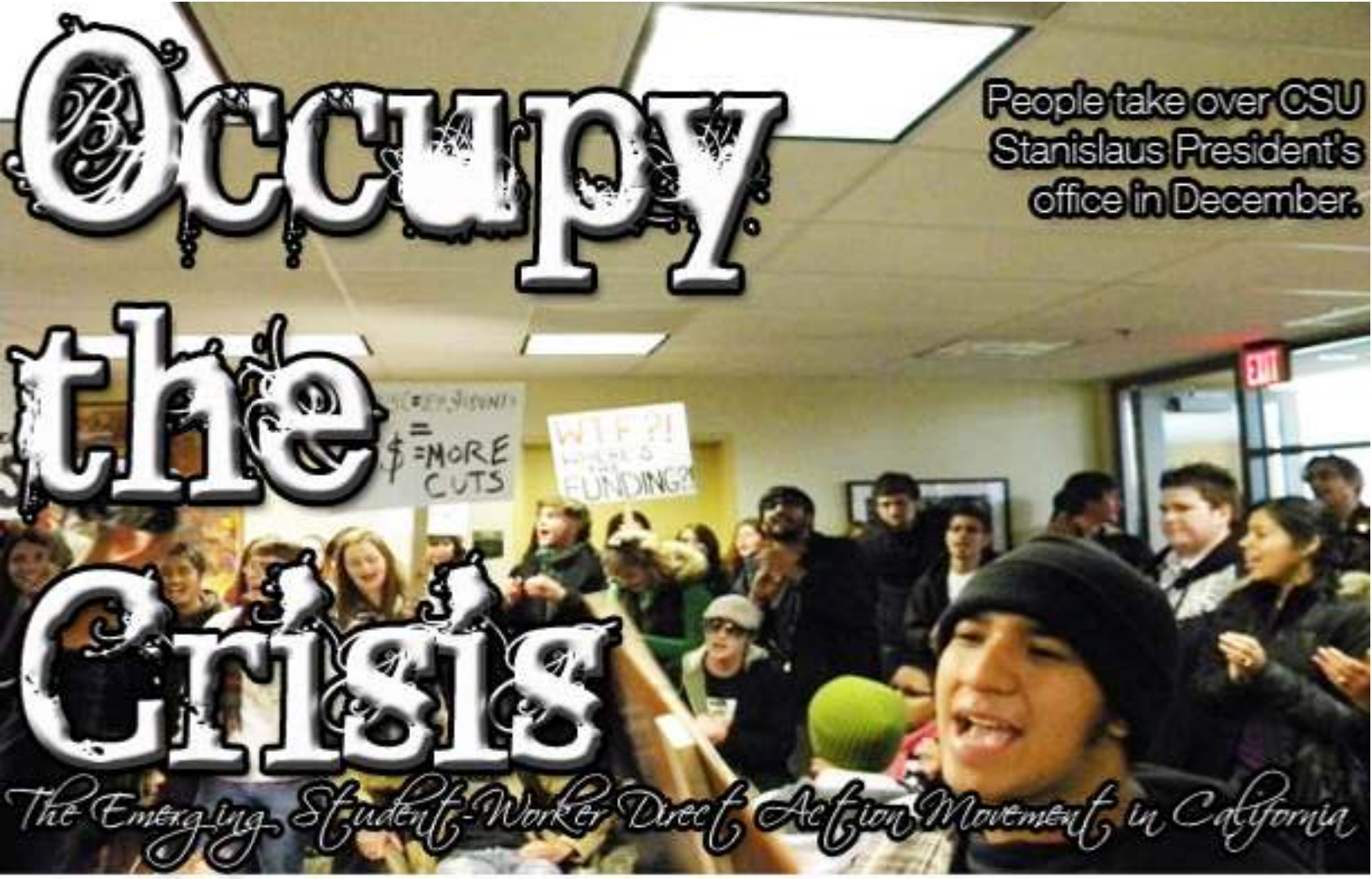
Modesto Police Prepare for Recession Time Rebellion: This fall, Modesto police revived training in crowd control techniques from the Department of Homeland Security. While the training scenarios were based around containing protests of animal rights activists and students (which is interesting given the recent wave of student uprisings and occupations), it is clear that such skills will be put into practice against the broader population. In the recent training, forty-five law enforcement officials participated, with about 15 from the Modesto Police Department. Mayor Ridenour said they plan to arrange another training that will give advanced techniques on handling large protests. As the economic and ecological crisis gets worse, and the need for direct and militant action becomes greater, are we going to allow the police to out maneuver us?

Merced Police Taser Man in Wheelchair: A 40 year old black man in a wheel chair, Gregory Williams, a double-leg amputee, spent six days in jail on suspicion of domestic violence and resisting arrest, although the Merced County District Attorney's Office hasn't filed charges in the case. He was also attacked by (the two arresting white) police officers with a taser during his arrest. Williams states that he was violently manhandled and tasered by police, even though he claims he was never physically aggressive toward the officers or resisted arrest. After his arrest, Williams says he was publicly humiliated after his pants fell down during the incident. The officers allegedly left him outdoors in broad daylight, handcuffed on the pavement, nude below the waist. A handful of residents who live in Williams' apartment complex claim they witnessed the incident and support Williams' charges.

Kettleman City Residents Continue to Battle, Racism, the Cops, and Elites: As we reported in the last issue of Modesto Anarcho, residents of the largely Latino town of Kettleman City are battling a hazardous waste facility. Since 2007, 20 children have been born in the town, five of them with birth defects. Out of these five, three have died, all were born with oral deformities known as clefts. The hazardous waste facility is the largest landfill of its kind west of Louisiana, and the only facility in California licensed to accept carcinogenic PCBs. Residents of the town opposed the companies plans for expansion, and are calling for an open investigation into the plant. Moves by residents at city council meetings to call for such measures have been met with repression from the police, with local cops keeping residents from chanting and marching. The police are the guards of the rich. Working and poor people: brown, white, black, red, yellow, and everything else, must stand in solidarity with those in Kettleman. http://www.greenaction.org/.

Taser International Advises Police to Not Aim at Chest: Taser International, the company that arms police departments around the United States, is now advising police to not "aim at the chest," because the blast from the weapon could cause cardiac arrest that could be fatal. Taser weapons in the hands of the police have lead to the deaths of more than 150 people in the U.S. in recent years, including many in the Central Valley. For more information on the use of tasers at the hands of the police, read "Of Tasers and Torture," in *Modesto Anarcho* #7.

Occupy the Crisis



People take over CSU Stanislaus President's office in December.

The Emerging Student-Worker Direct Action Movement in California

On Sept. 24th, thousands of students, faculty, and staff walked out of University of California campuses across the state. The walk-outs and one-day strike were called by a wide coalition of UC unions and activist groups as a largely symbolic protest against the budget cuts, fee hikes, and firings associated with the state budget crisis. At two campuses, however, in Santa Cruz and Berkeley, some people then walked back in and began to initiate occupations. Administrators and activists alike were stunned that the logic of symbolic protest had been abandoned for concrete, insurrectionary activity. Occupation, a tactic which is mostly unfamiliar in the U.S., is widely generalized in many social struggles throughout the world, and points towards new dimensions of struggle and autonomous organization that are likely to prove particularly vital as the economic crisis continues and deepens.

WHAT IS AN OCCUPATION?

An occupation is when people start taking over things that belong to rich people; it is a break in capitalist reality that occurs when people directly take control of a space. This suspends its normal function and creates a site of struggle and a weapon for autonomous power. Occupations are a common part of student struggles in France, where for example in 2006 a massive youth movement against the CPE (a new law that would allow employers to fire first-time workers who had been employed for up to 2 years without cause) occupied high schools and universities and blockaded transit routes. In 1999, the National Autonomous University of Mexico City was occupied for close to a year to prevent tuition from being charged. Both of these struggles were successful. In Greece and Chile, long and determined student struggles have turned campuses into cop-free zones, which has in turn led to their use as vital organizing spaces for social movement involving other groups like undocumented migrants and indigenous people.

Occupations have not been seen much in the U.S. since the 1970s until 2008 when workers at the Republic Windows and Doors Factory in Chicago occupied the building and won back pay from the bank that foreclosed the factory. In following months, university students in New York City staged several occupations in resistance to the corporatization of their schools. It was this activity which inspired the students in Santa Cruz and Berkeley.

WHAT IS THE CRISIS?

Students at UCs, CSUs, and Community Colleges are facing a 32-33% fee hike which their governing bodies ratified on November 17. 50,000 students were turned away from community colleges this year, and as many will be turned away from CSUs starting next year. The hikes, cuts and firings affecting public education (among other services) throughout this state (among other places) are described as austerity measures in response to the global economic crisis. Like the recession, those in power who are making these decisions would like us to believe they are temporary.

But it seems some of us have learned a little too well. It turns out that global capital has been in decline for about 30 years, and has only been kept aloft by various financial bubbles - the Savings & Loans bubble in the 80s, the dot-com bubble in the 90s, and more recently the housing market bubble which burst in 2008. This has led to the mass foreclosures throughout California as well as food riots throughout many of the poorer countries in the world.

We are going to school to avoid having to engage in menial labor for the rest of our lives, but this long collapse means the jobs simply won't be there. Most of us are working shit jobs already, sometimes alongside people with degrees. In the meantime, student loan volume has skyrocketed 800% since the early 80s. College is now just a place where we'll get ripped off one last time on our way to be dumped out of the system as debt-laden, unemployed nobodies. Out of a workforce of 20 million in California, 2 million are now unemployed and 1.5 million underemployed. Each year, it seems, capitalism needs fewer and fewer of us as workers (except for cops to keep the rest of us in line). We could well be heading into another Great Depression where we will have to band together to squat, loot, and organize our own communities just to survive.

Crises are often times when reactionary forces take hold, capitalizing on people's anxiety and desires to get back to "the way things were." This will very likely not be possible this time. This is why activist approaches geared towards returning things to normal and negotiating with the state miss the point entirely. We have a chance, if we use it wisely, to steer this crisis away from the reactionary option and towards a decisive break with the nightmare reign of capitalism which renders us nothing but its disposable appendages.

WHAT IS HAPPENING ON CALIFORNIA CAMPUSES?

The occupation of UC Berkeley on Sept 24th failed due to the intervention of reformist student activists, but the occupation of the Grad Student Commons at UC Santa Cruz went off successfully. Seizing control of this building on the campus's central plaza, occupiers hung banners that urged "TAKE OVER CAMPUS, TAKE OVER THE CITY, END CAPITAL!" and read a statement entitled "Occupy California". This explained that the occupation was a tactic to directly open space for the development of student and worker power, not a ploy to bargain with administrators. The discourse of the activist is dead for us. We know there is no funding and these assholes couldn't help us even if they did see us as anything besides numbers.

Over the next 6 days, the space was used to host meetings about how to broaden and escalate the struggle, as well as to throw several raging dance parties in the plaza. There was also an attempt to raid the campus bookstore en masse which was thwarted by cops. Eventually the occupation was dissolved as the deadline of a threatened police action approached, so that the momentum could be kept up and transferred to new projects rather than everyone getting arrested for no reason. The GSC was a bold step forward in an experimental process. One thing we learned was that at this stage, authorities are very reluctant to create confrontations: they know they look bad enough already. A tremendous amount of enthusiasm was focalized through the space, but unfortunately, the occupiers of the GSC had not planned to be able to hold the building for so long and had to scramble to assemble plans to spread radical activity. We learned that people will come out of the woodwork if they are excited about what's going on, but also that the occupation has to grow and ramify or it's nothing.

In the weeks since then, a number of sit-ins and soft (not barricaded) occupations of space have occurred at UC Berkeley, CSU Fullerton, and CSU Fresno. Another building at

UCSC, this time including the office of a dean who cut many programs and fired a bunch of people, was occupied briefly. Participants in the UCSC occupations traveled to several campuses in southern California recently and a UC-wide general assembly was held in Berkeley. Many folks have been inspired by the actions taken in Santa Cruz and there is a lot of talking and planning going on right now.

Some of the main obstacles the emerging student movement is facing are how to connect with non-student workers on campus, with people at other kinds of schools and with society as a whole. Another big issue is how to avoid being recuperated and co-opted by administrators and activists. One of the sit-ins, at a library at UC Berkeley, was seized on by the administration as an excuse to privatize library hours while showing how they are really listening to the students. At the second UCSC occupation, a Marxist professor convinced many people to dismantle barricades and go home early. It's hoped by some that the insurrectionary approach will have the virture of deepening, not neutralizing the contradictions we are currently experiencing.

As it states in the "Occupy California" communique, "This crisis is general and the revolt must be generalized... We call on the people of California to occupy and escalate." This means schools, workplaces, foreclosed homes, BART stations. This means we will break with capitalist time to inaugurate OUR time. We have begun.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Starting on November 18th, there were massive occupations, protests, strikes, and marches across the state at CSUs and UCs. In places such as Berkeley and Santa Cruz, buildings were occupied and barricades were formed to keep the police out. Now, unions and student groups have announced they are planning to hold actions across the state on March 4th to protest the current crisis. While geared to this temporality, the calls to action are not being framed around any deluded hopes for a return to a normalcy that was never good enough to begin with, and is certainly not coming back anyway.

We are under no illusions that we are 'leading' a struggle, only that we are situated uniquely to confront the crisis as youth recognizing that we simply have no future in capitalism. We can only begin where we are. If we begin, it opens space for other people (like non-student staff) to also begin taking charge of their own lives. If we act in concert, we can collectively dissolve the academy along with the alienating and exploitative society that it serves.

OCCUPY EVERYTHING

California Valley Miwok Tribe Occupies Foreclosed House in Stockton

In mid-2009, Modesto Anarcho Crew became aware of the decision of the California Valley Miwok Tribe (CVMT) to occupy their foreclosed home in Stockton, located in the Californian Central Valley about 20 north of Modesto. We contacted them the same day and the next day three of us drove out to meet them. We found their house to have its gates welded shut, guard dogs on patrol, and those inside the house firmly situated inside. Although we couldn't get onto the property due to the occupation, we talked to a tribal member about their struggle and offered some food and copies of our magazine. We traded emails and soon after this interview was conducted.

MA: Many people do not know the history of the Native peoples in the Central Valley, can you tell us a little about the history of the Miwoks?

CVMT: Previous to Rancherias being created in California, the Miwok People's territory covered ten (10) counties. Now our Tribe is fighting to retain its Tribal Property that consists of one and one half (1 ½) acres, located in (Morada) Stockton, California.

MA: How does your tribe use the house that is located in Stockton?

CVMT: The Tribal Property at 10601 Escondido Pl. Stockton, California 95212 has a multi-purpose function. Since our tribe is a landless tribe, the piece of property, including the building, is considered to the Tribe to be its reservation, and is utilized as such. Until such time as the tribe is able to acquire a larger tract of land for the benefit of future tribal members [the house is all we have]. The Tribe conducts official Tribal 'governmental' business, day-to-day office duties, Tribal Programs, Tribal Meetings, and a portion of the building is used for housing.

MA: What brought your house to foreclosure?

CVMT: Our PL-93 638 Mature Status Contract (BIA) has been illegally withheld for two years and our Indian Gaming Revenue Sharing Trust Fund (RSTF) monies have been illegally stopped. Since the end of 2005. Without any funds coming in, the Tribe had no way to pay its mortgage on the only piece of property, the place the Tribe calls "home". Please see our DOT US website for further info:
http://www.californiavalleymiwoks.us

MA: Why did people physically occupy your house? How did you go about making sure that people were not going to be able to easily get into the house?

CVMT: The Tribe decided to stand its ground when it was threatened with eviction. We had no choice, where were we supposed to go? Our monies have been illegally withheld for no good reason, our jobs lost, our medical benefits lost with our jobs, we tribal members have been using own personal money to keep the Tribe going, to keep the USDA Food Program open for the people in need to still be able to get their monthly rations of food. We had to make our point clear that we were no longer going to be pushed out and forgotten like yesterday's trash!! We are human beings. We are not just names and/ or numbers on a piece of paper. We needed the Department of the Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, DC to take notice of what was being allowed to happen to our Tribe. We were pushed in a corner and had no other choice but to go into survival mode and stand our ground. The Tribe went into a vote and decided to go into lockdown and barricade itself in until the Dept. of the Interior would be forced to take notice of our devastating situation and agree to sit down at the table with us to resolve our immediate problem that had been ignored up until we decided to stand our ground.

I can't answer the second part of your question because our crisis isn't over yet. We are still negotiating.

MA: How have the state and their police responded to your situation? How have other people and/ or institutions tried to hinder your efforts?

CVMT: Well, the state still hasn't released the Tribe's money. I would say that the sad part to this dilemma is seeing some of the people believing the negative stuff that had been going out on blogs. It hurts our hearts to see people say such cruel things when they don't know the whole truth behind the situation. We are confident that the truth will prevail and so we don't follow the blogs. Although we do want to thank those who stood by us and still stand with us today...

MA: In what ways have other Tribes and communities/groups offered you support?

CVMT: We are thankful for the internet radio talk shows , tv hosts, Veteran Affairs, some pocket members of the American Indian Movement (AIM), legal services, individual concerned citizens (Indians and non-Indian peoples), universities, special interest groups, Canadian Indians, doctors, Calaveras Band of Mi-Wuk Indians, Calaveras County Mountain Miwuk, Historical Shingle Springs Miwok Indians, Modesto Anarcho, Ghost Machine Group, United Native Americans Inc., WPFW Nightwolf, Onnativeground. Recently, Chairperson Burley did a presentation at the Consumnes River College in Sacramento in which they have asked how they can help show their support for the Tribe. Also, UC San Diego has passed a resolution in support of the California Valley Miwok Tribe and they have continued to be stong advocates to help our tribe get justice.

MA: Anything you would like to add?

CVMT: We ("The Tribe") are asking for help from the General Public. Please help our tribe survive. Help us protect not only our history/culture but the native history that is a big part of California and the United States. For more information, please visit our website at:

http://www.californiavalleymiwoktribe.us/

Crisis in California: Everything Touched by Capital Turns Toxic

By Gifford Hartman

The United States' most populous state, California is the world's eighth largest economy. The state has some of the planet's most productive farmland and in the 1990s enjoyed an extensive real-estate boom. But intensive, industrialised agriculture has polluted much of the environment and now, with more foreclosed homes than anywhere else in the world, it is also home to a growing number of tent cities. Gifford Hartman takes us on a road trip through California's Central Valley to witness the toxicity of: mortgages and ecosystems, houses, drugs and human relations.

SHANTYTOWN USA

In California toxic capitalist social relations demonstrated their full irrationality in May 2009 when banks bulldozed brand-new, but unsold, McMansions in the exurbs of Southern California.

Across the United States an eviction occurs every 13 seconds and there are at the moment at least five empty homes for every homeless person. The newly homeless are finding beds unavailable as shelters are stretched well beyond capacity. St. John's Shelter for Women and Children in Sacramento regularly turns away 350 people a night. Many of these people end up in the burgeoning tent cities that are often located in the same places as the 'Hoovervilles' – similar structures, named after then President Herbert Hoover – of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The tent city in Sacramento, California's state capital, was set up on land that had previously been a garbage dump. It became internationally known when news media from Germany, the UK, Switzerland and elsewhere covered it. It was featured in the French magazine Paris Match and on The Oprah Winfrey Show in the US. Of course this publicity necessitated that Arnold Schwarzenegger, California's governor, and Kevin Johnson, mayor of Sacramento, shut it down. When we visited in March 2009 to investigate, we met Governor Schwarzenegger and Mayor Johnson there by chance. Johnson told us the tent city would be evacuated, saying, 'They can't stay here, this land is toxic.'

Almost half the people we spoke with had until recently been working in the building trades. When the housing boom collapsed they simply could not find work. Some homeless people choose to live outside for a variety of reasons, including not being allowed to take pets into homeless shelters or to freely drink and use substances. But most of the tent city dwellers desperately wanted to be working and wanted to be housed. In many places people creating tent encampments are met with hostility, and are blamed for their own condition. New York City, with a reputation for intolerance towards the homeless, recently shut down a tent city in East Harlem. Homeowners near a tent city of 200 in Tampa, Florida organised to close it down, saying it would 'devalue' their homes. In Seattle, police have removed several tent cities, each named 'Nickelsville' after the Mayor who ordered the evictions.

Yet in some places, like Nashville, Tennessee, tent cities are tolerated by local police and politicians. Church groups are even allowed to build showers and provide services. Other cities that have allowed these

encampments are: Champaign, Illinois; St. Petersburg, Florida; Lacey, Washington; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Reno, Nevada; Columbus, Ohio; Portland, Oregon. Ventura, California recently changed its laws to allow the homeless to sleep in cars and nearby Santa Barbara has made similar allowances. In San Diego, California a tent city appears every night in front of the main public library downtown.

California seems to be where most new tent cities are appearing, although many are covert and try to avoid detection. One that attracted overflowing crowds is in the Los Angeles exurb of Ontario. The region is called the 'Inland Empire' and had been booming until recently; it's been hit extremely hard by the wave of foreclosures and mass layoffs. Ontario is a city of 175,000 residents, so when the homeless population in the tent city exploded past 400, a residency requirement was created. Only those born or recently residing in Ontario could stay. The city provides guards and basic services for those who can legally live there.

TOXIC TOUR ALONG HIGHWAY 99

California's Central Valley is 720km long and 80km wide, sitting between the Sierra Nevada and Coast Range mountains. Its two main rivers are the Sacramento and the San Joaquin, which run through the northern and southern parts, giving their names to the valley's two sections. The two rivers join in a massive delta that flows into the San Francisco Bay. It is the most productive agricultural region in the world where, since the 1970s, developers have been paving over fertile soil to build massive tract-style suburban and exurban housing.

For years, the monocultural practices of highly centralised agribusiness have been polluting ecosystems with a toxicity that spreads environmental damage beyond the region. More recently, the mortgages financing the new homes have become the toxic assets polluting social relations. In the midst of the world's richest farmlands, the Central Valley probably has more foreclosed homes than anywhere else in the world. Historically, some parts of the Valley have had the lowest wages in the US and some of the highest rates of unemployment outside the Midwestern 'Rust Belt.' The Valley competes with the Los Angeles basin for the worst air quality in the US. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the town of Arvin – immortalised in John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath for the government-funded migrant workers camp called 'Weedpatch' – has the dirtiest air in the country.

Interstate 80 is the second-longest highway in the United States, traversing the country from San Francisco in California's Bay Area to the suburbs of New York City. Driving east along Interstate 80 from the Bay Area, chaotic, unplanned suburban sprawl has replaced farmland for nearly all of the 140km to Sacramento. There are a few breaks when the terrain is hilly and a few crop fields have survived, but otherwise all you see are longs strips of suburbanity: shopping malls, endless rows of tract homes, automobile and recreational boat dealerships (many now just empty lots), office parks and billboards. Running south of Sacramento, through the heart of the Central Valley, is Highway 99. For decades the towns and cities of the Central Valley have been amongst the fastest growing in the US, and as you drive along the highway you pass through all these places that until recently had all the garish optimism of boom towns.

The first big city you reach after Sacramento is Stockton, home to a deep-water sea port that connects major rivers with the San Joaquin Delta, the Bay and trans-Pacific trade. In the earlier years of the decade, Stockton was at the centre of the speculative housing bubble. In 2008 it had the highest rate of foreclosures in the country. It also has one of the highest unemployment rates and Forbes magazine recently rated it the 'most miserable city in the US.'

Further south there is more of the same American consumer culture: shopping malls surrounded by massive parking lots and a huge Christian high school in the town of Ripon. In places railroad tracks and changing yards run alongside 99, but many of the tall grain silos and food processing facilities have been abandoned.

The next big city is Modesto – the number one city in the US for car thefts and number five on Forbes' 'most miserable' list. Here the fertile farmland has been concreted over to build 'affordable' housing for commuters, some of whom endure a two-hour each-way drive to the Bay Area.

Continuing south through Merced – with the second highest 'official' unemployment rate of any US city – there's yet more malls and chain stores, but also reminders of the agricultural industry: a few orchards and livestock pens along the highway, as well as dealers in tractors and other farm machinery. You can also see the plentiful irrigation canals that move water from the wet north to the Valley's dry southern end. What is striking is how much of the industrial and

agricultural infrastructure appears to be rusting away. Many plants display huge 'For Sale' signs.

Two hundred and seventy kilometres south of Sacramento, you reach Fresno, California's fifth largest city, with a population of half a million. Fresno is the hub of the San Joaquin portion of the valley and it always seems to be in a haze of brown smog, especially during the stiflingly hot summer months. It is the 'asthma capital of California,' a result not only of vehicle and industrial pollution, but also the airborne pesticides and other toxic chemicals used in agriculture. Fresno County is the most productive and profitable agricultural county in the US. Until recently it was also home to three large downtown tent cities, as well as other smaller encampments scattered throughout the city and along the highways.

The first tent city, on Union Pacific railroad property, was evicted in July 2009. It was literally toxic: sludge was discovered oozing out of holes in the ground in the summer of 2008, possibly due to the site's previous use for vehicle repair. 'New Jack City' – after the 1991 film about violent crack-dealing urban gangs – earned its name because two murders have already occurred there. The third tent city is more like a shantytown because many of the living spaces are built with scavenged wood. It is called 'Taco Flats' or 'Little Tijuana' because of its many Latino residents. These are mostly migrant agricultural labourers, unemployed because of the economic crisis and because a three-year drought has severely reduced the number of crops being planted.

Farm work has always been seasonal and unstable, and it has relied on migrant labour since the Gold Rush of 1849. Right now 92% of agricultural workers are immigrants. Chinese workers – often derogatorily referred to as 'Coolies' – were brought in to build the railroads. Once the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, they worked in mining until racism and declining yields drove them off. Many ended up labouring in the fields until the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prevented further immigration, and also resulted in many Chinese being driven out of rural areas and into urban ghettos. Growers then turned to Japanese, Filipino, Armenian, Italian and Portuguese immigrants, as well as Sikhs from the Punjab region and beyond. During the Great Depression of the 1930s they employed 'Okie' and 'Arkie' refugees from the Dust Bowl – native-born white migrants, mostly former sharecropper or tenant farmers from Oklahoma and Arkansas. Mexican immigrants have also been used for this work and they, along with Central Americans, have become the overwhelming majority of agricultural workers today.

ONE BIG UNION

Fresno also has a history of struggle. It's where the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or 'Wobblies') waged a successful six-month Free Speech Fight in 1910–11. The battle attracted several hundred Wobblies and other migratory workers from up and down the West Coast to support the right to organise on public streets and to 'soapbox.' The guiding force was IWW organiser Frank Little, who arrived from a free speech fight in the agricultural area around Spokane, Washington. (Little, who was half-Indian, was lynched in Butte, Montana in 1917, whilst helping organise a copper workers' strike and arguing that working men should refuse to fight a World War on behalf of their oppressors.) At the time, Fresno called itself the 'Raisin Capital of the World' and at the end of each summer, 5,000 Japanese workers and another 3,000 hobos would arrive in Fresno for the grape harvest. Much like the tent cities today, workers camped out downtown and looked for work in what was known as the 'slave market.' The Japanese were often very united and willing to strike for higher wages and better conditions. Knowing that the IWW tried to organise all workers, regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender or sector, the local elites were terrified that the Japanese might align themselves with the IWW. They resorted to violent harassment and mass arrests of IWW soapbox orators, frequently using vigilantes. The struggle continued in the courtroom where the Wobblies took up as much time as possible, seeking to make their trials political and agitating for class struggle. This fight for free speech was victorious, although its main effect was Fresno's political leaders and local farm owners becoming more tolerant of the conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL) and its attempts to organise farm workers.

The next major IWW confrontation took place in 1913, in the Sacramento Valley's hop-growing region. The Durst Hop Ranch in Wheatland advertised in newspapers throughout California the need for 2,700 workers. In fact they needed only 1,500. The intention was to create a surplus of workers to push down wages. The advertisements eventually drew 2,800 workers of 24 ethnicities, speaking two-dozen languages. It was extremely hot, there was no clean water and there were only nine outdoor toilets. People had to sleep in the fields if they did not want to pay Durst for a tent and, without clean drinking water, the only alternative was paying Durst's cousin five cents for lemonade. Stores in town were forbidden to come to the ranch to sell to the workers, forcing them to buy supplies at Durst's own store. With no garbage removal or sanitation, many workers became sick. Durst withheld 10% of wages until the end

In 2004, truckers with the IWW began a series of successful wildcat strikes in Stockton

of the harvest, hoping that the filthy conditions would drive many to leave without collecting them.

A hundred or so of the men had some connection to the IWW and they quickly called a meeting, more to discuss the deplorable living conditions than the pitiful wages. About 2,000 people gathered to hear the Wobbly organisers speak, but the meeting was broken up by the sheriff and his men. Four people were killed in the resulting riot, two workers and two from the sheriff's posse. Most of workers fled the Durst Ranch and scattered. A reign of terror then began. All over California radicals were targeted in the hunt for the Wobblies judged responsible for inciting the riot. But the state's investigation of the unhealthy conditions at the ranch that followed led to new laws to improve the living conditions of agricultural workers.

Even so, fifty years later almost nothing had changed concerning the creation of a 'reserve army of labour,' or the use of racism to keep workers divided and weak. The appalling conditions under which workers continued to labour, as many still do today, encouraged Cesar Chavez to lead a farm worker organising drive in Delano in the San Joaquin Valley in the 1960s. It resulted in the formation of the United Farm Workers union.

GOLD, GREEN GOLD, BLACK GOLD: CALIFORNIA'S CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT

Gold was discovered in California in 1848. The Central Valley grew with the rest of the state as capitalism appeared seemingly out of nowhere, practically overnight. California gold enabled the world economy to recover during the age of revolution in Europe and it fired the rapid urban industrial expansion across the United States. The San Francisco Bay Area became one of the most dynamic regions of capitalist accumulation in the late 19th Century, a role that the area of Southern California around Los Angeles continued to play throughout the 20th. California's later expansion was based on 'green and black gold': agricultural commodities and oil. From the early 20th Century, several counties in California began to lead the US in the production of both.

Agriculture is much like any other form of capitalist production. With increasing mechanisation, the concentration of capital and centralisation of production (and now with the use of genetically modified crops), higher yields can be achieved with fewer workers, who labour on a smaller number of larger farms. California's Central Valley was the first region in the US to develop this system of industrial agriculture on a mass scale: agribusiness. As capital tightened its control of farm work – in a move from its 'formal' to 'real' domination over labour – the resulting highly productive agricultural sector was able to take advantage of advances in transportation to sell its products on the world market. This in turn threw weaker producers into crisis. In Europe, millions of peasants were driven off the land, and many were forced to emigrate to places like the US. Globally, cheaper food meant workers could feed themselves and their families more cheaply, allowing wages to fall, even as working class living standards – in some countries – rose.

The novel The Octopus: A California Story, by Frank Norris, paints a vivid picture of this process of the proletarianisation of the Central Valley's agricultural labour force in the 1880s. A generation later, John Steinbeck described the completion of the process in The Grapes of Wrath, as internal migrants – the dust bowl refugees – trekked from Oklahoma to the Central Valley during the Great Depression seeking work. This agribusiness system of market-driven, centralised production resulted in the violent and brutal industrial exploitation of agricultural workers. These conditions are still apparent today, as an army of mostly Mexican and Central American farm and ranch workers roam throughout California toiling for low wages and under equally precarious conditions.

The main difference is that the increasing reliance on petrochemicals in agriculture exposes farm workers to a wider variety of deadly toxins. Water has become a commodity critical for California's development. Most rain falls in the state's northern part, but 80% of the agricultural and urban demand is in the south. An enormous, now creaking infrastructure of interconnected canals, dams, reservoirs and pumps moves water from sea level in the north to an elevation

of 150m in the south, allowing vegetables, fruit and nuts to be grown in the San Joaquin Valley. But California's development has always been rooted in an ideology of endless growth and the idea that soil is real estate. From the 1980s onwards, water distribution across the state has become more deregulated, whilst influence over the bureaucracies managing water has shifted from agribusiness to property developers. As farmland has been paved over, water once used to irrigate crops has become available to property developments as far afield as Orange County in southern California, Las Vegas in Nevada and Phoenix, more than 1,000km away, in Arizona's rapidly developing sunbelt. Water, freed from its obligations to Central Valley agribusiness, was part of the fuel that fired the massive housing boom throughout California and the south-western US. But as demand for water outstripped supply, the conditions for future droughts were created.

At the same time as much farmland has made way for development, other farms and ranches have centralised and concentrated even more as they have shifted to a narrower range of more lucrative cash crops and livestock production. Between 1996 and 2006, dairy production increased by 72% and almond acreage by 127%. An amazing 80% of the world's almond crop comes from 250,000 hectares of orchards in the Central Valley. This form of monoculture has its toxic effects. There are simply not enough bees in the Valley to pollinate all the almond trees, so over 40 billion of them are brought in for the three weeks the trees are in bloom in February: some are trucked all the way along Interstate 80 from New England and others are flown from as far away as Australia. En route the bees are fed what amounts to insect junk food: high-fructose corn syrup and flower pollen imported from China, causing Colony Collapse Disorder. As many as 80% of bees have left their hives, never to return. Since bees pollinate nearly two-thirds of plants that end up as food, this could have disastrous consequences for humans.

The 'rationalisation' of agriculture, coupled with property development, has already had disastrous consequences for humans in Mendota, a town 50km due west of Fresno. Mendota's population is just under 10,000; 95% of its residents are Latino and most work in agriculture. Mendota claims to be the 'cantaloupe capital of the world,' but the crop requires irrigation and the drought has prevented planting, putting many people out of work. The town now has a second title as the 'unemployment capital of California,' with a 41% jobless rate. As alcoholism runs rampant and the social fabric breaks down, the nearby Mendota Federal Prison offers one of only a few future employment possibilities. Budget problems mean the prison is currently only 40% finished, but President Obama has pledged $49 million of stimulus money towards its completion. Once built, it should provide 350 jobs. Prisons are a growth industry in California, where one in six prisoners is serving a life sentence.

At the end of the 19th Century, oil was discovered in Kern County, in the southern, San Joaquin part of the Central Valley. Kern County contains three of the US' five largest oil fields. With all the refineries in the area adding to the toxic mix, the air is heavy with ozone and other forms of particle pollution. Exposure to industrial chemicals, especially in the workplace, is listed in various reports as a major cause of toxicity in the region. Women's Health magazine listed Bakersfield, the County seat, as the country's most unhealthy city for women.

This southern end of the Valley was merely a desert until the irrigation projects brought water. But the soil also contained salt and alkalis from an ancient seabed. A plan was devised for a master drain through the centre of the Valley that would dump these wastes in the San Francisco Bay from which they could be flushed out into the Pacific Ocean. Environmental protests prevented the completion of the project and the drain instead ended up dumping into the Kesterson Reservoir, site of a refuge for migratory birds. In the early 1980s, birds began to die in large numbers, chicks were born with deformities and cattle grazing nearby became sick. The cause was discovered to be selenium, a naturally occurring trace element common to desert soil, toxic in high concentrations. The area became another human-made toxic hotspot, the reservoir was drained and capped with soil, and the wildlife sanctuary closed.

But the poisoning of land, people and animals is not limited to mistakes like Kesterson. Concentrated, high-yield farming is chemical-intensive. A result of this is rapid soil-depletion, salinisation, desertification and outright toxic contamination – by metals such as lead, and salts like selenium. These chemicals include carcinogens that cause cancer, teratogens that cause birth defects and mutagens that cause genetic changes. In 1988, the United Farm Workers union demanded that five toxic pesticides used by grape growers – dinoseb, methyl bromide, parathion, phosdrin and captan – be banned.

TOXIC HOUSING, TOXIC SELF-MEDICATION

California's housing boom, like that of the US

more generally, was fuelled by the creation of collateralised debt obligations (CDOs) that were based on readily available subprime and other risky mortgages. CDOs rapidly became 'toxic assets' when the bubble burst. The notion of 'toxic assets' is of course something of a metaphor, but the housing boom created hundreds of thousand of homes that are literally toxic. It began with the confluence of the national housing boom and the rebuilding of New Orleans and other parts of Louisiana, Florida and Texas in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. Massive quantities of drywall – also known as plasterboard or gypsum board – were needed. Builders, especially developers of large-scale housing tracts like Lennar Corporation, the second biggest home-builder in the US, imported 250,000 tons from China. Although this Chinese drywall mostly ended up in Florida and Louisiana, much of it also found its way into Central Valley developments. The material gives off carbon disulfide and carbonyl sulfide, which corrode copper pipes, electrical wiring and appliances like air conditioners. Worse still, people have suffered nosebleeds and rashes, whilst children have been afflicted by ear and respiratory infections.

Owners wishing to sell these toxic new homes are legally required to reveal that they have Chinese drywall, resulting in house prices falling as low as $19,000. Some of the bigger builders, like Lennar, are ripping out the drywall and repairing some of the homes they built. But others have gone bankrupt, or are on the verge of collapse, and have done nothing. Most banks have refused to renegotiate or adjust loans on these toxic homes, leaving their buyers trapped.

Beyond these doubly toxic walls lie the Fresno tent cities, which are plagued by a high level of drug use, particularly methamphetamine, commonly called 'meth' or 'crystal meth.' Across the working class areas of Fresno, the use of this addictive psychostimulant drug has been defined by local health workers as having reached 'epidemic' proportions. The Central Valley was the birthplace of the modern illicit form of this drug, originally produced and distributed by biker-gangs like the Hell's Angels. The biker drug networks were mostly broken by the police in the early 1990s, only to be replaced by Mexican drug cartels using even more rationalised international systems of production and distribution. The Central Valley around Fresno is key to meth production not only because of the large-scale operators, but also the tens of thousand of smaller producers, all of whom use the rural setting to operate clandestine labs and super-labs on farms and ranches. The plague of this commodity of immiseration is growing across the US. As social order breaks down due to the crisis, many turn to self-medicating themselves with this toxic substance.

Social problems in the Central Valley once again attracted international media attention in August 2009, when the BBC aired the documentary, The City Addicted to Crystal Meth. Filmed in Fresno, it details how social breakdown has been accelerated both by the urban sprawl during the housing bubble and by the unemployment and mass foreclosures that have accompanied its inevitable collapse. The resulting desperation spread meth to the working class beyond the Central Valley, making it one of the most popularly abused drugs in the world today. The documentary features meth-users decrying 'cookers,' those who actually mix the toxic chemicals to produce the drug, as being 'brain damaged.' Meanwhile, many admit their own brains have been damaged by use of the drug which is sometimes consumed by those as young as 11. Some families contain multigenerational users, and many have been destroyed with increased incidences of domestic violence, incarceration, and premature death.

The chemicals used to produce meth are not only highly toxic, but highly flammable too. Many meth labs have exploded as a result, killing the cookers and burning down nearby buildings. Some cookers produce meth on the run and have ended up burning down whole motels when their rooms have exploded due to inadequate ventilation. Beyond its immediate costs, one of the worst aspects of the manufacture of methamphetamines is the waste. Each kilogram of meth produced results in five to seven kilos of waste. Inevitably, this frequently gets dumped in remote rural areas, such as the parks and forests in the foothills enclosing the Central Valley.

AN IMAGE FROM OUR FUTURE?

Commonplace though it may be: the economic crisis is global. So why focus on California's Central Valley? Because, to return to Marx, '[t]he country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.' Because the upheaval most shamelessly caused by capitalist development in California has continued unabated, perhaps even gaining speed. Because the wasteland of devastated eco-systems and toxic lives that we encounter there, where capitalism has contaminated every aspect of human social relations it has touched, may be what lies in store for all of us.

In the Preface to the first German edition of Capital in 1867, Marx suggests we observe 'phenomena where they occur in their most typical form'. In his day that meant 'production and exchange' and the conditions of 'industrial and agricultural labourers' in England. If we do this, he said we can confront those who say that in their own country 'things are not nearly so bad.' In our day, the United States – particularly California – has replaced England as the world's most advanced capitalist economy. Here we see that violent exploitation of humans is linked to the abusive treatment of the land. That toxic housing, toxic mortgages and the abuse of toxic drugs complement each other. And, in almost impossibly rarified form: the full irrationality of toxic capitalist social relations.

Got something to say? Something going on at your work, where you live, or in your town? Email us at: anarcho209@yahoo.com. Check our website at: modestoanarcho.org and send us letters at:
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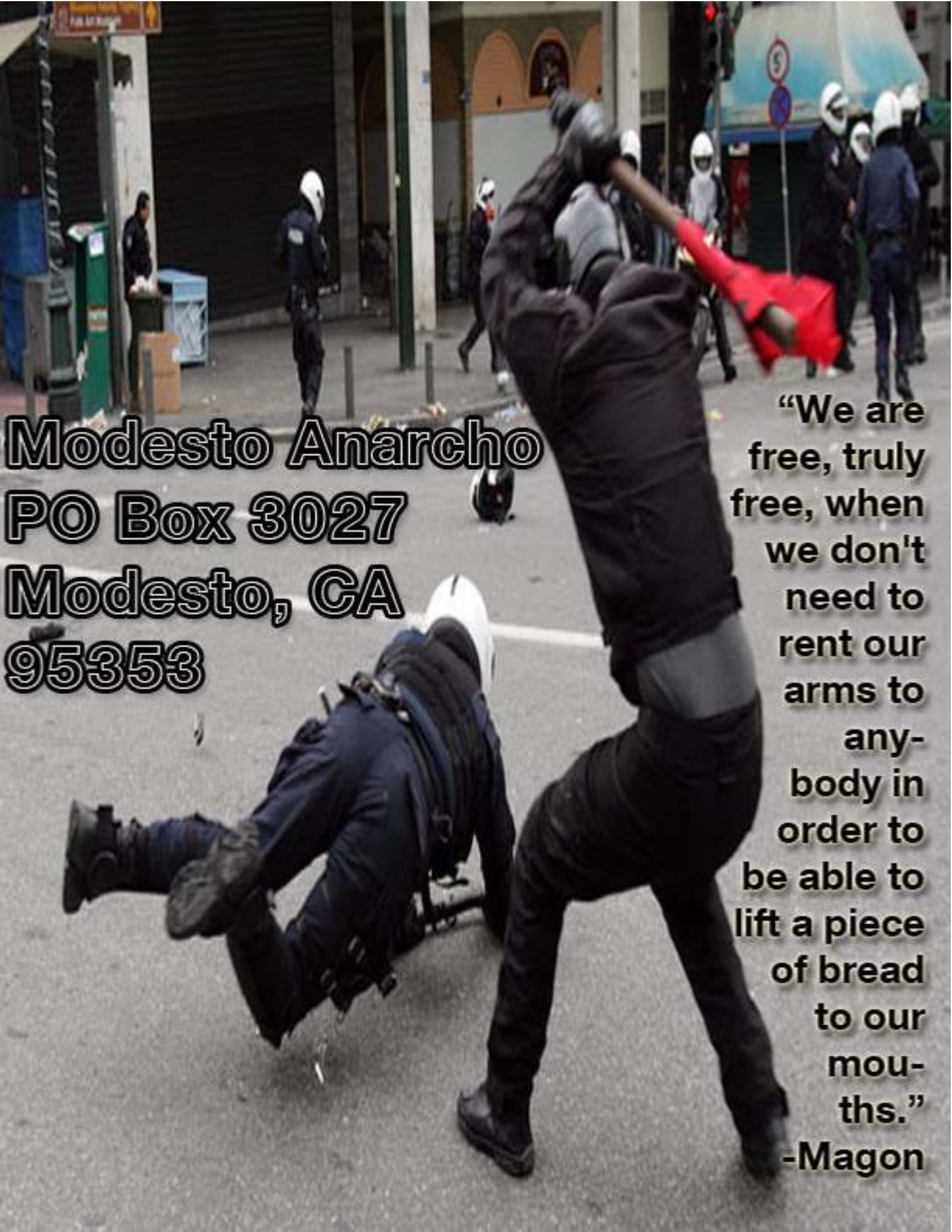
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"We are free, truly free, when we don't need to rent our arms to anybody in order to be able to lift a piece of bread to our mouths."
-Magon